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10-13-2009

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Recommended Citation

Gianino, Matthew, "Institute On Disability Receives \$319,000 To Launch National Inclusive Education Initiative For Students With Autism, Related Disabilities" (2009). *UNH Today*. 224.
<https://scholars.unh.edu/news/224>

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Institute On Disability Receives \$319,000 To Launch National Inclusive Education Initiative For Students With Autism, Related Disabilities

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Institute on Disability / UCED

Oct. 13, 2009

DURHAM, N.H. –The Institute on Disability (IOD) at the University of New Hampshire has received \$319,000 from the U.S. Department of Education to launch the National Inclusive Education Initiative (NIEI), a national project that focuses on best practices in inclusive education for students with autism and related disabilities. The NIEI will draw on the IOD's long-standing expertise in autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and on New Hampshire's success in improving student outcomes through inclusive education.

"The UNH Institute on Disability is nationally renowned for developing curriculum and providing technical assistance to support youth with autism and related disabilities," says Congresswoman Carol Shea-Porter (NH-D), who secured the funding through the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009.

"Since 1987, the IOD has had a focus on inclusive education, learning from our experience and other leaders in the field and working with educators, families and communities to improve the access to and learning of the general education curriculum for all students. This new initiative will bring the expertise we've gained to a national audience," says NIEI director Cheryl Jorgensen.

"New Hampshire one of the national leaders in educating students with ASD in general education classrooms," continues Jorgensen. "We are uniquely positioned to be a national model for how the inclusion of students with autism and related disabilities as full participants in general education classrooms is not only possible but essential."

Primary NIEI activities include:

- Model schools: Developing 20 state and national model-demonstration schools.
- Professional preparation: Recruiting and enrolling graduate students into appropriate university graduate and certificate programs.
- Online learning: Producing e-learning courses and webinars, as well as online professional learning communities for educators on the topic of supporting students with ASD and related disabilities in general education classrooms.
- Leadership: Training parents, youth, teachers, and administrators to develop their leadership skills related to supporting students with ASD and related disabilities and their families in inclusive schools and communities.

A study published Oct. 5, 2009 in the journal Pediatrics found a reported autism rate of approximately one in 91, higher than previously believed. The Centers for Disease Control currently reports a rate of one in 150, but acknowledges prevalence findings indicate that approximately one percent of children are affected with an ASD. An updated CDC report is expected out later this year.

More than 30 years of research has shown that academic and other important outcomes are positively correlated with the amount of time these students spend in general education classrooms. The NIEI is designed to be an evidence-based resource for educators and families as they strategize to address the complex learning needs of an increasingly diverse population of students. For more information, visit the Institute on Disability website at www.iod.unh.edu.

The Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire was established in 1987 to provide a coherent university-based focus for the improvement of knowledge, policies, and practices related to the lives of persons with disabilities and their families. Its mission is to advance policies and systems changes, promising practices, education, and research that strengthen communities to ensure full access, equal opportunities, and participation for all persons.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a New England liberal arts college and a major research university with a strong focus on undergraduate-oriented research. A land, sea and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.